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## **Mentally ill homeless and companion pets**

Maria Salomé Garde

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MENTALLY ILL HOMELESS  
AND COMPANION PETS

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Maria Salomé Garde

June 2003

MENTALLY ILL HOMELESS  
AND COMPANION PETS

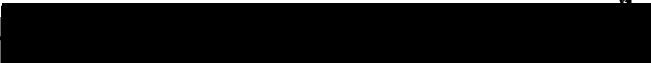
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A Project  
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---

by  
Maria Salomé Garde  
June 2003

Approved by:

  
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5/20/03  
Date

  
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## ABSTRACT

The present study assessed the relationship between mentally ill homeless and their companion pets and questioned if the pets acted as a barrier for them to receive shelter and other services. The study also sought to find if pets acted as a communication tool between this population and society. Twenty participants were found on the streets of San Bernardino and Riverside counties and interviewed. The study suggested that there is a strong bond between the mentally ill homeless and their companion animals and they are not allowed in homeless shelters due to the pet. There was little significance in pets acting as a social facilitator for the homeless.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give my deepest thanks to Dr. Rosemary McCaslin who inspired this project and is a tremendous asset to the social work profession.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband, Jim Comer who stood by and supported me throughout the ups and downs of the Master's Program. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my parents Rufino and Christine Garde.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

The problem to be researched within this study was homelessness. Homelessness is a growing problem within the United States and more importantly within the counties of San Bernardino and Riverside. The Stewart B. McKinney Act of 1987 was the first and only major federal legislation addressing homelessness. This governmental act defines homelessness as an individual who lacks fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and who has a primary nighttime residence that is supervised publicly, an institution that provides temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or a public or private place not designated for ordinary sleeping accommodations for human beings (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2003).

Homelessness is caused due to many factors, which may include the United States housing costs rising faster than income, mental illness, physical illness, substance abuse, and an overall lack of work due to economic issues. The 2000 Census found that approximately 350 people within San Bernardino County were homeless, however the Homeless

Coalition found a more accurate figure that 3080 were homeless. The Federal Government estimates that 1% of the population is homeless which would infer that approximately 16,000 within the county are homeless. The population is likely at least that large since San Bernardino has one of the highest levels of poverty in comparison with other counties within California (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2003).

The increasing rates of homelessness are further exacerbated by the fact that there are not enough shelters and resources to aid this population. The same economy and current government budget cuts that are forcing many to become homeless are also limiting the funds allotted to shelters and programs that provide for the homeless. It also appears that because society has deemed the homeless to be throwaways, the first cuts to state and local governments involve the funds for the growing homeless population.

#### Purpose of the Study

A significant percentage of homeless are mentally ill individuals who have been left to wander the streets due to the deinstitutionalization of the 1970's or because of a lack of appropriate resources to assist them in finding

housing or psychiatric services. This population of mentally ill homeless appears to be more vulnerable and at risk than the other homeless who may be temporarily homeless or mentally able to live on the streets. The mentally ill homeless however are at a higher risk of having violent crimes committed against them, or being a danger to themselves because they are mentally vulnerable and victims of a mental disorder.

Studies have also found that it is in a state's interest to provide services and help rehabilitate this population in order to save government funds. A New York study was done of mentally ill homeless who were placed in supportive housing and given rehabilitative services. The researchers found that these people experienced a marked reduction in further shelter use, inpatient hospitalizations, length of hospitalizations and decreased incarcerations. The study also found that the mentally ill homeless that did not obtain housing services averaged approximately \$40,449.00 per person, per year in services that had to be paid for by the state (Houghton, 2001). Therefore, it behooves the government, communities and social work profession to focus especially at serving this population.

The author of the current study noticed that many mentally ill homeless are seen to have companion pets. It also appeared that many mentally ill homeless and homeless citizens in general, are very attached to these animals and that perhaps this relationship could be utilized to help this population obtain social services. The purpose of this study was to assess the interaction between mentally ill homeless people and their companion pets. The relationship between owner and pet was analyzed in terms of the level of bond that is shared as well as the reasons why a homeless person benefits from having a pet. Another component that was studied was whether having a pet can become a liability and barrier to the homeless person in receiving medical treatment or housing assistance.

The study was conducted in an interview format because the researcher wanted to have direct contact with the population and gain knowledge regarding their views. It was hoped that by conducting this study, might new ways might be found not only of making contact with the homeless population and inspiring new studies, but also that new services could be established to aid this vulnerable population.

## Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study may aid social workers and housing agencies to understand the bond that is formed between humans and pets and incorporate this knowledge into providing services and shelters that allow both humans and pets. These results might also aid the homeless victims, specifically mentally ill homeless victims, and serve communities in understanding the homeless population.

Furthermore if the findings indicated that the homeless were turned away when seeking services because their companion pet was not allowed, then shelters and housing assistance programs might need to be educated in order to change their policies and adapt services in order to serve and meet the needs of this population more effectively. The development of these services might also initiate a decrease in the homeless population.

The findings of this study may also aid mental health agencies in better serving the mentally ill since a large portion of the homeless population suffers from psychiatric problems. It has been falsely believed by some that the mentally ill cannot relate or communicate effectively with others and do not think logically. It has also been speculated that they cannot care for others,

maintain any responsibilities, or care for themselves yet they have been observed to have healthy, well cared for pets. The relationship between the mentally ill individual and the pet could be examined for how it might assist intervention. If the mentally ill individual can be responsible for a pet, then one would assume that they can be responsible for others. If they can relate and communicate with a dog, then perhaps that dog can be incorporated into their treatment and aid the social worker in effectively assisting the individual and aiding in their stabilization.

Therefore in light of the above information, the research question and purpose of the study was to assess the relationship between mentally ill homeless and their companion pets and to determine if the pets acted as a barrier for them to receive shelter or psychiatric assistance. It was hypothesized by the author that the homeless person looks upon their pet as a source of social support and security; however, when faced with obtaining services, they were denied because they were not willing to give up the bond that they had developed with their pet. It was also hypothesized that the pets could be incorporated into housing services as well as psychiatric

facilities to aid social workers in providing adequate services to this homeless population.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

In order to effectively address and research the issue at hand, previous knowledge and research related to this topic was reviewed and analyzed. Information regarding the homeless lifestyle was obtained, as well as information regarding the current therapeutic applications of animal-assisted therapy.

#### Homelessness

Homelessness is a national problem that is increasing and many men, women, and families are found to be wandering the streets or living in temporary shelters. Homelessness is associated with social problems such as living below the poverty level, less federally subsidized housing, decreases in financial aid to low income families, the huge reduction in demand for unskilled and day labor, and urban renewal (Kidd & Kidd, 1994).

The homeless population includes some of the mentally ill population that were released during the deinstitutionalization movement of the 1960's and 70's. Further, studies reveal that homelessness itself can be a risk factor for mental illness because the loss of one's



home base is a severe stressor, and the conditions of life in human shelters often produce symptoms of trauma (Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991). Many homeless have been found to have posttraumatic stress disorder which when combined with the continuing psychological trauma of being homeless, can lead to symptoms of a general sense of helplessness, substance abuse, a sense of isolation, and existential separateness from others (Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991).

#### Theory Guiding Conceptualization

A feature of psychosocial trauma is the experience of social disaffiliation (Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991). This results in the severance of secure bonds and damages the psychological sense of trust, safety, and security. This sense of need for attachment is essential for the psychological well-being among humans and has been expressed by John Bowlby (as cited in Goodman, et. al, 1991) who described the need for intimate and long lasting attachments in order to achieve feelings of self-worth. As cited in Skolnick (1996) Bowlby also stated that human beings have an innate fear of solitude and strangers, and therefore throughout the life cycle require attachment figures in order to feel secure in the world. Many times

this necessary attachment or support system is not supplied by other humans or social services directed toward the mentally ill homeless, but instead the support may come in the form of a companion pet.

### The Benefits of Pets

Studies done involving pets show that having some sort of animal companionship reduces loneliness and contributes to a general sense of well-being throughout the life cycle (Sable, 1995). Pets have been found to serve as excellent companions to the elderly in nursing homes, to cancer patients who found that having a pet lessened their fears of dying, loneliness, and isolation, as well as providing comfort to recently divorced or widowed individuals. Pets also provide solace and emotional support, and give unconditional love and acceptance (Kidd & Kidd, 1994).

Francis, Turner, and Johnson (1985) found that pets helped people improve social interactions, psychosocial functioning, life satisfaction, social competence, and psychological well-being, as well as reducing depression. Pets also provide a link with reality, which can enhance emotional stability (Frank, 1984). Therefore it is understandable why many homeless adopt pets.

## Therapeutic Pets

Besides being companions, pets have also been found to be an aid in therapeutic measures. Pet facilitated treatment, or animal assisted therapy has been described as an applied science using animals to solve human problems (Gammonley, 1991). Studies conducted on 30 non-communicative patients showed that when they experienced aided therapy with a dog there was increased development of self-respect, independence, self-confidence, and social interaction among subjects (Corson & Corson, 1980).

Robb, Boyd, and Pristach (1980) conducted a study of pet facilitated therapy among the chronically ill aged population in long term care. It was observed that smiling, verbalization, and opening of the eyes took place when a puppy was present. Hostility and negative statements among the participants also ceased in the presence of the puppy and positive social interactions took place, suggesting that the puppy acted as a social catalyst.

Studies conducted with the mentally ill and animals reveal that a therapeutic effect also takes place among this population. In a 1986 study conducted by Beck, Seraydarian, and Hunter, the use of caged finches was

examined at Haverford State Hospital for the institutionalized mentally ill. Two groups were randomly assigned and consisted of schizophrenics who had been hospitalized for approximately 3 to 5 years. One group was introduced to the caged finches who sat inside the room during their therapy group, and the non-bird group continued therapy without the presence of the birds. After 10 weeks the experiment had to be terminated because 4 of the 8 patients in the bird group had been discharged from the hospital; however, no one from the non-bird group participants had been discharged. Within the 10 weeks it was found that attendance was greater for the treatment group with the birds and that more participation had also occurred in the presence of the birds. It was also found that the levels of hostility and suspiciousness of the group decreased, implying that the finches had made the environment seem safer and less hostile among the group.

Allen and Budson (1982) observed the effects of dogs in psychiatric residential group homes. They found that the dogs were especially effective with individuals who had difficulty establishing relationships with other people. The relationship with the dog seemed to reaffirm the residents' capacity to give and accept affection. Other therapeutic factors observed were that the

individuals took on the role of a caretaker instead of the receivers of care; they were the depended upon instead of the dependent. Caring for the dog resulted in their performing a natural task instead of being directed by a higher authority. Overall the pet acted as stabilization in their life.

And although the exact relationship and therapeutic factors are unclear, it is known that animal assisted treatment with psychiatric patients results in higher social interactions, greater ability to establish a human relationship, stronger and more focused positive affect, opportunity to express feelings to fellow group members, greater sensory stimulation, greater sense of normalcy, and belonging or acceptance by others (Halcomb & Meacham, 1989).

#### Homeless and Pets

It may also be hypothesized that pets act as a communication tool between the homeless population and mainstream society. McNicholas and Collis (2000) conducted a follow up study to Messant's 1983 study regarding the social facilitation of pets. A well dressed subject as well as a poorly dressed subject both walked with a dog, as well as a subject who walked alone. The results showed

that the two subjects who walked with a dog engaged in more social interactions than the subject who walked alone. Another surprising finding was that the outward appearance of the person did not distract from the ability of the dog to facilitate interaction. Therefore it was found that dogs did indeed act as a catalyst in generating human to human interactions.

Kidd and Kidd conducted a 1994 study in which 105 homeless adults (52 owned pets, 53 did not own a pet) were questioned qualitatively regarding their level of pet attachment. Sixty-two percent of pet owners stated that their pet was their only source of companionship and love. Sixty-seven percent of pet owners also stated that people treated them better than homeless people without pets. They found that having a pet opened the door for conversation with others and also conveyed the message that they could take responsibility for another life.

The problems of pet ownership were also evaluated and one hundred percent of the pet owners reported that they had not found any human shelters which permitted their pets. Many participants stated that they would not go to any shelter that did not accept their pet. Fifty-eight percent of the pet owners also informed that feeding their pet was a problem; in fact, they often denied themselves

food in order to feed the pet. Fifty-six percent of pet owners also worried about not being able to afford veterinary care for their pet and sixty-three percent had located free clinics that provided care. The overall results of the study demonstrated that pets contribute to the mental and physical health of their homeless owners.

Rew (2000) conducted a study that focused on the coping strategies of homeless youth. It was found that eighty-one percent of the subjects identified two coping strategies: being with friends and having a dog companion. Dog were found to provide safety, unconditional love, and a reason to continue striving in this population. In some cases of dog ownership, the pet curtailed some negative life choices such as drinking and drug usage. Owners had to think carefully about how to spend their funds in order to provide food and care for the dog.

In 1995, a follow up study of Kidd & Kidd's research was conducted by Singer, Hart, and Zasloff, which focused on the difficulty of homeless pet owners finding housing that allowed both the owner and pet. Sixty-six participants were given a questionnaire as well as the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale at a veterinary clinic that provided free services. This study once again found that the pet owners had a high level of attachment to

their pets. Participants were also questioned regarding their desire to find housing and the limitations of the pet. Eighty-three percent of pet owners informed that they would never live without their animals and would never consider housing if their pet was not allowed. Thirty-five percent of the participants had sought out housing and been refused because they owned a pet. This study demonstrated that housing is a difficult issue for the homeless when they have pets and that many shelters and housing programs are not providing an integrated program for this population.

#### Summary

Therefore in summary, according to the literature, pets play an important part in the lives of their owners. The bond with and qualities of pets are being recognized and being used for therapeutic measures among the elderly, mentally disabled, and mentally ill. It also seems that the homeless population has observed the benefits of pet ownership and have formed some sort of bond with pets. Perhaps because they have been socially isolated from the other populations, or because they live in a different reality, having a pet is the only attachment that they can entertain. Perhaps with further research and study, it can



also be determined that pets play an important role in the lives of homeless individuals and that this human-animal bond may be used in order to provide services to this population. Companion pets could be incorporated and allowed in homeless shelters, and possibly used to facilitate communication with the homeless population.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This study sought to further knowledge in the area of the mentally ill homeless population and their companion pets. It was hypothesized that companion pets may be both an asset and detriment to this population in regards to receiving shelter and services. The following chapter will explain the study design, sampling, data collection, procedures, and data analyses that were utilized within this study.

#### Study Design

This study was an exploratory one in which the relationship between mentally ill homeless and their companion animals was explored. The method to assess this relationship consisted of a quantitative and qualitative survey. This format was the most appropriate due to the population and accessibility issues.

The research question and purpose of the current study was to assess the relationship between homeless mentally ill and their pets and to determine if the pets acted as a barrier in receiving shelter or psychiatric assistance. The two hypotheses studied were:

- 1) that the mentally ill homeless person looks upon their companion pet as a source of social support and security and when faced with obtaining psychiatric or housing services, is denied because he/she is not willing to give up the bond that they have formed with the pet; and
- 2) that pets act as a communication tool between the mentally ill homeless population and mainstream society.

#### Sampling

The present study obtained a sample of 20 mentally ill homeless participants with pets. The age range of these participants was from 18 to 90 years of age. An equal number of males and females were approached (10 males, 10 females). These participants were found at various shelters, soup kitchens, on the street, or in parks within San Bernardino and Riverside County.

Individuals who had been homeless for more than 3 months were included within the study. Homeless was defined as not owning a home and not having an income. Mental illness was defined as having been hospitalized or incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital/ward once in the past five years. Participants were in fair physical health.

## Data Collection and Instruments

Quantitative questions regarding their demographics, length and frequency of homelessness, and mental status were asked by the interviewer. These were the independent variables. Qualitative open-ended questions were also asked regarding the attachment bond with the pet, reasons for owning a pet, if the pet was a liability or deterrent in finding housing and services, and if they would accept services if the pet was included. The social facilitation theory of pets was also studied and several questions testing this correlation were asked. These were the dependent variables. The level of measurement utilized for the questions were nominal and interval. Questions in regards to year of birth, length of pet ownership, how many nights were spent in shelters, number of times not allowed into a shelter due to the pet, number of times being approached due to the pet, and whereabouts of pet during an inpatient hospitalization or incarceration were all interval. The remaining 11 questions were measured on a nominal level.

The questions asked in the interview format were created by the researcher based on knowledge obtained by the literature review and professional knowledge (Appendix A). The questionnaire was pre-tested on colleagues in

order to assess whether it had face validity and reliability.

Before beginning the study, the researcher gave each potential participant a verbal informed consent (Appendix B) and if necessary, explained the contents. The researcher also assessed whether the participant understood the consent and their rights to participate or refuse. An informal mental status examination was conducted in order to determine if the subject was capable of giving informed consent.

The strength of this design was that information was gained directly from the population through face-to-face contact. The interview questions were also easily understood and appropriate to the study. The limitations of the study were that the population to be questioned may not have been mentally stable and able to answer the questions appropriately thereby affecting the validity of the study. Another limitation was that the population was not easily accessible or willing to participate in the study therefore decreasing the sample size.

#### Procedures

The data for this study was obtained by one-on-one contact between the researcher and the subject. The

participants were found within San Bernardino and Riverside Counties and asked 17 questions. The researcher approached the potential participants and conducted a verbal informed consent (Appendix B), which informed the participant of a study that was being conducted for a school project, which involved the relationship between homeless mentally ill individuals and their pets. The participants were also informed of their privacy and anonymity, as well as how long the questioning would take, and their right to conclude the questioning if they chose to no longer participate.

The study consisted of qualitative and quantitative questions asked by the individual researcher. The data collection consisted over a period of three months.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

Participation in the study was voluntary. Potential participants were informed of the purpose of the study and verbal informed consent was obtained (Appendix B). Participants were informed that their identity and information would be kept anonymous. Participants would not be asked any identifying information. Once the study was completed, all gathered information was destroyed.

The subject was also protected in the respect that if at any point during the interview the researcher had assessed the participant to be in extreme need of psychiatric or medical help in which he/she was a danger to himself or others, the interview would have been immediately concluded and referrals or arrangements made for the participant to obtain appropriate services.

A debriefing statement (Appendix C) was given to the participants at the end of the study. The debriefing provided the necessary information regarding where the results of the study could be found, as well as shelter and services available if needed by the participants.

#### Data Analysis

The study consisted of quantitative and qualitative questions, which included nominal and ordinal levels of measurement. The frequency of both the qualitative and quantitative responses were obtained, as well as mean and standard deviation for each ordinal variable. The bivariate analyses were conducted using correlations and independent sample t-tests. Significance was found using t-tests and a one-way Anova.

### Summary

In summary, 20 participants were recruited and an interview including quantitative and qualitative questions was conducted. The data consisted of nominal and ordinal measures. Correlations and independent samples t-tests were utilized to test the associations among the variables.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the study will be presented. Some support was found for the first hypothesis, however there was little for the second.

#### Presentation of the Findings

The mean age of the participants was 45, with the ages ranging from 23 to 67. Twelve (60%) of the participants were Anglo, three (15%) were African-American, four (20%) were Hispanic, and one (5%) was Asian. Ten (50%) were males and ten (50%) were females. Twelve (60%) had attended or completed high school. Eight (40%) had attended some college or had a college degree. The mean years of being homeless for the participants was 5.15 years with a standard deviation of 3.167. All participants were mentally ill.

The first hypothesis was supported. Eighteen (90%) out of twenty participants said that they would not give up their pet if offered shelter, however if allowed to keep their pet, all twenty (100%) participants would accept the shelter. Thirteen (65%) participants had not been allowed into a shelter within the last year due to

the pet and the other seven (35%) participants had not sought shelter within the last year.

Twelve (60%) participants said that they owned their pet for friendship and companionship reasons, and eight (40%) owned due to safety reasons and utilized the pet for protection while on the streets. Seventeen (85%) of the participants had owned pets in the past; fourteen (70%) of these did not feel that it was more difficult to have a pet than not.

The hypothesis regarding the social facilitation of pets was not supported statistically. Only six (30%) of the participants had been approached once regarding their pet, and four (20%) had been approached twice within the last week. However, this pattern suggests that people notice homeless individuals with pets and do make some sort of contact with them based on the presence of the animal.

The variables that did have a reasonable amount of variance or range of responses were examined further. Independent t-tests showed no significance in relation between the years the participants were homeless or the length of pet ownership and whether they had not been allowed in a shelter with a pet, if anyone had approached them in regards to the pet, or the reason for owning a

pet. Age was not a factor in ownership of a pet, nor did it have any impact on the other factors associated with being homeless. The participants' education level was also found to have no bearing on the above mentioned factors. Correlations (Pearson's  $r$ ) were also used to establish if there were any associations between the groups; however no significance was found.

#### Summary

The findings of the study reveal that the first hypothesis is supported with 100% of the participants stating that they would accept shelter if their pet was allowed and 90% refusing services if the pet is not allowed. Furthermore, most homeless mentally ill seem to have pets for companionship and safety reasons. Age, ethnicity, and education were not significantly associated with the dependent variables.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The results support the hypothesis that many mentally ill homeless look for safety and companionship when owning a companion animal. It is suggested that a strong bond is formed between individual and animal and furthermore, that when shelter or resources are available that exclude the animal they are not utilized by the individual.

#### Discussion

The present study finds what past research has suggested which is that animals play an important role in the lives of humans. They are not only family pets, but they can also be used for therapeutic practices such as animal assisted therapy to deal with psychological issues, to elevate the mood of dying medical patients, or as contributors to the overall mental well-being of people suffering from depression, mental health issues, or other everyday situations like divorce, loneliness, or the death of a loved one. Furthermore, the present study found, much like the studies conducted by Kidd and Kidd (1994), Singer et al. (1995), and Rew (2000), that companion animals also play a very important role in the homeless individual's

life. These pets act as a constant companion who provides unconditional love, protection, and may even curtail drug and alcohol abuse among the homeless.

Furthermore, the present study suggests that the homeless mentally ill consider their companion pets as friends and protection and would not be willing to sever their ownership of the pet in order to obtain shelter. However, if allowed to keep the pet, the participants would accept the shelter and possibly any other services that would incorporate the pet into their treatment. It seems that mentally ill people are capable of caring for pets and in fact consider them to be their friends due to the strong bond that they have formed with these animals.

The second hypothesis was not supported, i.e. that companion pets act as a social facilitator for the homeless individual. The lack of significant findings could have been attributed to a small sample size or location of the homeless individual in relation to mainstream society. However, it was found that some mentally ill homeless individuals are approached by others due to the presence of the companion pet. It seems that society does notice and recognize that many homeless individuals have pets and will therefore initiate contact.

### Limitations

The study had several limitations that may have played a factor in the findings. The population was somewhat difficult to locate; many homeless were found however, homeless mentally ill with pets were a rare and difficult find. This difficulty in locating participants lowered the sample size of the study.

It would benefit future researchers to have knowledge of where this population could be found, or perhaps the researchers could recruit homeless assistants to aid in searching for and interviewing participants.

Another limitation of the study was that, due to the population's mental illness, they may not have been mentally stable when answering questions, or they may have answered them inaccurately. Perhaps a complete mental status exam of the participants prior to the interview would be needed for future researchers interested in conducting a similar study.

### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

It seems that, based on the findings of this study, it would be beneficial for social workers working with this population to understand the strong bond between the individual and their companion pet. It would also behoove

the social worker to incorporate the companion animal into therapy, using it as in animal assisted therapy, or focusing on the needs of both the individual and pet as a whole unit. The social worker should also note that, in gaining rapport with the homeless individual, perhaps initial contact should be focused on issues of the companion pet in order to gain the trust of the individual.

As for policy issues, it seems that policy makers should most importantly allow more funds to go towards shelters and other resources for the whole homeless population, as it is a rapidly growing population. Furthermore, homeless shelters should focus more on accommodating the homeless mentally ill with pets. Shelters could make arrangements to house the pets in another facility or work cooperatively with kennels, humane societies, etc. to temporarily house these companion animals. This would thus aide in supplying shelter for the individual and possibly lead to more use of supportive services.

More research can be done regarding this population in general. More data can be obtained regarding the beneficial aspects of having a companion animal, the level of human-animal bond, as well as how having a pet has

increased the psychological well being of the homeless individual. More research could also be done in regards to the social facilitation of pets and if they are indeed instrumental in building a connection between mainstream society and the homeless.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, animals play an important role in the lives of homeless mentally ill individuals. Furthermore, the mentally ill are able to properly care for these companion animals and in turn the animals provide friendship, unconditional love, and therapeutic benefits to the overall mental health of the individuals. With further research and dedication to this issue, social workers might incorporate pets into their therapeutic practice and find a more effective way to connect with this population and provide appropriate services and resources.



APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

### Interview Questions

- 1) What year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Your education level?
  - 1) some high school
  - 2) completed high school
  - 3) some college
  - 4) college degree
- 3) What is your ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) How long have you been homeless? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) How long have you had your pet? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Have/had you owned a pet in the past?
  - 1) yes
  - 2) no
- 7) Is it more difficult to have a pet than not?
  - 1) yes
  - 2) no
- 8) Why do you have a pet?
  - 1) friendship/companionship
  - 2) safety
  - 3) other \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) How many nights in the past month have you been in a shelter?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 10) Did you have your pet with you?
  - 1) yes
  - 2) no
- 11) How many times in the last year were you not allowed into a shelter because of your pet? \_\_\_\_\_

- 12) If you were offered shelter but had to give up your pet, would you accept the shelter?
- 1) yes
  - 2) no
- 13) If you were offered shelter but allowed to keep the pet with you, would you accept it?
- 1) yes
  - 2) no
- 14) During the last week, how many people have approached you or asked about your pet? \_\_\_\_\_
- 15) Were you ever 5150ed or taken to the hospital by the police?
- 1) yes
  - 2) no
- 16) Were you ever taken to jail and given medications during your incarceration?
- 1) yes
  - 2) no
- 17) If so, what happened to the pet during your hospitalization or incarceration?

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APPENDIX B  
VERBAL INFORMED CONSENT

## **Verbal Informed Consent**

Upon finding a potential participant, I will introduce myself: "Hi, my name is Maria. I'm a Social Work student at California State University and I also work for the Department of Behavioral Health for San Bernardino County. I work with people who live in board and care homes and I've been wondering if they have to give up their pets to get that kind of help. I'm also conducting a study for school and would like to make you a part of my study and ask you some questions about your relationship with your pet and any services you might have received. May I explain how this will work?"

"If you decide to participate, I'll ask you questions and it will take about 20 minutes of your time. Everything you tell me will be between you and me. I won't write your first name down anywhere and I won't even ask your last name. I also want to let you know that no harm will come to you or your pet whether you choose to participate or not. And lastly I want you to know that if you should ever want services from the county or anywhere else, that your participation in this study will have no affect on that."

"So, do you understand so far what I'm doing and asking of you? Do you have any questions? If they do not I will ask, "So do you agree for me to ask you some questions?" If so I will then explain to them: "Okay but let me tell you before we start that if any point you no longer want me to continue asking you questions, just let me know and we'll stop the interview. I want you to be comfortable and not feel that you're being forced to do this. So just let me know if you want me to stop asking questions." And this point, I will begin to ask questions of participant.

APPENDIX C  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

### **Debriefing Statement**

You have just participated in a study that is researching the relationship between homeless people and their companion animals. The need for shelters and services that incorporate pets was also being studied.

If you should have any questions or concerns regarding the study, please contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at California State University, San Bernardino, Department of Social Work (909) 880-5807.

If you would like to review the results of this study you can visit Pfau Library at California State University San Bernardino or contact Maria Garde at the Department of Behavioral Health (909) 421-9365 after June 2003.

If after this interview you feel that you need to speak to someone about these issues or would like to get shelter and services, please contact the Homeless Program of San Bernardino at 590 N. Sierra Way, San Bernardino, CA (909) 387-7675 or The Homeless Outreach Program & Education (HOPE) Center at 213 N. Fern Ave., Ontario, CA (909) 983-5783.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

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